Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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Editorial

Annual Gathering of Subscribers to the Newsletter for Birdwatchers

Our Annual Gathering will be held on Sunday, the 4th January 2004 at the former residence of the Editor at Doddagubbi (courtesy Prestige Estates). We hope that the North-East Monsoon will be better than the South-West so that a visit to the lake in the neighbourhood will be a pleasure for birdwatchers.

We are glad to announce that Ms Dominique Homberger, the Secretary General of the International Ornithological Congress will be the Chief Guest. I hope several of our readers, even from far away, will give us the privilege of meeting them.

The programme will be as usual :

Coffee and snacks at 8 a.m.

Birding in the surroundings, Socialise at will, Assemble at 11 a.m.

Introductory talk by Editor, Speech by the Chief Guest, Discussion on bird related topics.

Lunch at 1.00 p.m. and Tea at 3.30 p.m. Departure as per individual convenience

It would be a help if those intending to come would inform Ms Vimala or Shoba at telephone No. 080-3364142, 080-3364682 or confirm by E-mail <navbarat@blr.vsnl.net.in>

Please note that only subscribers and supporters to the Newsletter for Birdwatchers are invited. Please register your names latest by 31st Dec. 2003.

Bird Identification Interactive Key and Resource Material

The Centre of Ecological Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science, bangalore has developed a CD based interactive key along with supporting resource material for identification of some of the common bird species of India. On the user making a series out of 16 choices, for instance, whether the bird under observation has a long tail (Yes/No), the programme offers a list of possible candidate species in decreasing order of likelihood. The programme is robust enough so that it is not essential that all 16 choices be made, or that all of them be correct. The user can then go on to find more about the candidate species from an album of photographs, paintings and calls, and then arrive at his own conclusion. This CD is being offered to all interested users at cost, for Rs 20 apiece. A set of these will be on hand during the get-together on January 4, 2004 and a CES volunteer would be happy to explain and answer any questions. CES would greatly appreciate bird watchers trying out the CD and providing suggestions, constructive or otherwise to enhance the quality, coverage and reach of this product.

Sri. C. Jayaram IFS., Deputy Conservator of Forest, now in charge of restoring several lakes in Bangalore on behalf of Bangalore Development Authority will give a talk about the work he is doing.

Restoration of Agram (Agara) Lake

We have been cheered at long last, by the attempts of the Karnataka Government to "restore" some of the lakes in the city. We are witness to one such attempt which needs to be applauded.

For several years my wife and I had been watching the steady deterioration of the Agram Lake. Five years ago there were a surprising number of purple moorhens and egrets in the squelch in the middle of the lake. With increasing eutrophication the moorhens disappeared but the egrets continued to assemble there in their hundreds perhaps because they felt at home in their traditional roosting site. About a year ago my wife wrote a distressed article about its possibilities and the reality on the ground. The local paper to which it was sent slept over it for a year. Meanwhile the BDA had got into action and prepared a careful plan for the restoration of this water body. Fortunately the officer-in-charge of its execution is C Jayaram IFS (Karnataka Cadre). well known to the birdwatching community of Bangalore for his interest in birds.

And now for the comedy. The article which my wife wrote (referred to above) was published recently and it justifiably provoked the BDA officials because it had become totally irrelevant. A couple of BDA officials descended on us to express their annoyance and fortunately gave me a copy of the Project Report which I had been unable to procure "through proper channels". The proposals are being vigorously implemented and very soon this lake will be a pleasure for humans and birds alike. I give here some facts relating to the Project.

Note : All subscriptions & related correspondence should be sent only to the Publisher and not to the Editor.

The original area of the lake was 130 acres and now it is reduced to 96 acres because of the roads built on its periphery.

The lake surprisingly has still a large catchment and the quantity of water flowing through the storm water drains is expected to be 2000 million litres during the peak flow period. This will bring in a lot of organic and nutritious matter and arrangements are being made to divert it so that it does not pollute the central water body.

The lake bed has been desilted to a depth of 1.5 metres and a suitable silt trap has been made at the inflow point so that it does not get silted again.

A walkway is being built all round the lake where native species of trees are bring planted. The combination of water and indigenous trees will become a haven for birds.

About a month ago (early September) I was present at the southern end of the lake when the first inflow produced a rush of water. Over a hundred pariah kites were swooping over the water presumably for fish. It was wonderful to see this area restored to life again, and in a few months when the walkways and the planting have been done it will be a wonderful rendezvous for birders.

Guest Editors

As you have been informed in the Sept/Oct Issue there will be Guest Editors for the next few months. Aasheesh Pittie and V. Santharam will edit the Jan/Feb 2004 Newsletter and S. Sridhar will be both publisher and editor for the Mar. /Apr. and May/June numbers. I hope to be back in the saddle to edit the July/Aug 2004 issue onwards unless the Guest Editors sack me.

Wise Owls and Brainless Lemmings

TARA GANDHI, Norway Diplomatic Bag Section, Ministry of External Affairs, South Block, New Delhi 110 011

This year there was a population boom of lemmings in Norway. A cyclic phenomenon repeating every 3-4 years, hordes of lemmings crawl over the spectacular Norwegian countryside as the spring arrives. Next year in most likelihood, their numbers will drop so low that they virtually disappear from the scene. On a springtime field visit to the vicinity of Gol in the beautiful highland marshes of central Norway, I was fortunate to experience a part of the drama of the lemmings' rise and fall, set against a backdrop of mountains streaked with melting snow.

Lemmings are hamster-like, virtually tail-less rodents covered with mottled rusty brown, grey-black and white fur. In the month of May, they could be seen scurrying over the lichen-and moss covered stony ground in the Gol mountains. Several factors appear to contribute towards the dramatic fluctuation phenomenon. The herbivorous rodents feed on mosses, grasses and sedges that grow profusely during this season. During peak "lemming years" the large numbers severely overgraze the vegetation. Therefore as a survival technique, the food plants start producing toxins to become unpalatable. The lemming population then crashes due to lack of nutrition. As a low level is reached, the plant toxins in turn get reduced, and once again the cyclic process begins.

The populations of many species of birds of prey as well as of small predatory animals in these parts, tend to follow the population uprise-decline pattern demonstrated by lemmings, and to a lesser extent by other rodents like mountain rats. It is theorised that a dynamic prey-predator balance exists between these species, which in addition to the anti-grazing plant toxins, can cause such cycles.

The Scandinavian lemming *Lemmus lemmus* is one of four species of lemmings found in the Arctic, and is the only one endemic to Norway, Sweden and to small parts of Finland and Russia. Other lemmings like the collared lemming have a wider distribution in the Arctic zones of North America and Greenland. Scandinavian lemmings are found between the Arctic tundra and the boreal forest zone in southern Norway and Sweden (CAFF 2001). Their typical habitat during the warmer months is among bogs and wetlands of the middle and lower Alpine zones above the tree line, dominated by salix-juniper vegetation. The Gol area of our field visit is an example of this habitat, which is also the most favourable nesting ground for owls and other birds of prey at this time of the year.

While all the lemming species migrate during the spring and fall seasons, with each migration period lasting for a few weeks, *Lemmus lemmus* is the only species that has a remarkable fall migration that on high density years can last up to 2-3 months (CAFF 2001). This huge movement could very well have inspired the fables and stories of mysterious mass suicide by lemmings that rush together in large numbers to drown themselves or jump off cliffs. Is it likely that disoriented or exhausted lemmings fall by the wayside or get swept away in the fast-moving icy streams? Or possibly could it be some kind of stress caused by over-population that makes them reckless or succumb to herd instinct? I noticed that some of them certainly seemed to have a death-wish, sitting on rocks or running on bare ground in full daylight exposing themselves to the dreaded birds of prey which were flying around searching for food for themselves and for their young. Not being an expert on lemming IQ, I found it hard to fathom such seemingly stupid and atypical rodent behaviour.

A number of raptors in the northern latitudes rely on lemmings for their breeding success. The Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca,* a threatened species, is heavily dependent on lemmings. On years when the lemming population peaks, Snowy Owls, Hawk Owls *Surnia ulula*, Short-eared Owls *Asio flammeus* and Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* arrive in good numbers to nest and spend the spring and summer gorging on the abundant lemmings. Evidence of these feasts were visible around our camp site. Carcases of partially eaten lemmings lay strewn about among the low bushes and mossy hummocks, many with only the brain eaten away. Since the rest of the flesh is less relished, the birds could afford to pick out the choicest morsels of their plentiful food.

During low lemming years, these birds may not nest at all in Norway. Some may move elsewhere outside Scandinavia to places like Siberia or find locations where other prey is available. Since lemming fluctuations can show tremendous local variations, it is quite possible to find a decline in one area and not in the neighbouring area. Apart from the raptors, certain other bird species like the Long-tailed Jaeger or Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* and some mammals like the Arctic Fox *Alopex lagopus,* Ermine *Mustela erminea* and weasel are also linked to the lemming fluctuations and show very poor breeding rates in these years, with a low population of surviving individuals.

When the ecological conditions become favourable again, lemmings and other rodents reproduce rapidly and their numbers increase phenomenally. When the prey numbers are good, the predator species populations also rise and record numbers of young are produced. An interesting ecological feature referred to as the 'umbrella effect' is that some non - predator species also benefit at such times. For instance, Eider Ducks *Somateria* *mollissima* nesting in the vicinity of Skuas and Snowy Owls show higher survival rates of their eggs and chicks because the more aggressive predatory birds offer indirect protection by chasing away foxes that have easy access to the ducks' ground level nests. Waders and grouse species can benefit too since predation pressure is reduced with more available food.

It never gets dark during the high latitude spring and summer months. The famous midnight sun remains in the sky, dipping down to the horizon during the late hours, only to rise again soon thereafter. Night as we know it never falls, but is replaced by a kind of long twilight. As a result all the raptors including the diurnal birds of prey that normally call it a day at sunset, are out actively hunting until the wee hours. Watching a Short-eared Owl - well known for its daytime habit - glide lightly on its rather ghostly pale wings against the mellow light, it was hard to believe the time was 22.30 hrs! Just two more months of summer were left for the bird to enjoy this year's abundance of lemmings, and for the lemmings to enjoy the nutritious plants, till the cycle turns again to perhaps a completely different situation next year.

Acknowledgements: I am grateful to Christian Steel (SABIMA, Norway) for his detailed and valuable comments, and to Arnodd Håpnes (WWF Norway) and Morten Erichsen for their expert inputs.

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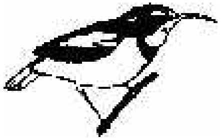

Breeding Behaviour of *Nectarinia Zeylonica*

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A pair of richly coloured *Nectarinia zeylonica* was under close observation between 18th and 20th July, 2001 in my backyard garden at Hyderabad, (17.20 N 78.30 E), for prelaying activities, nest occupation, egg-clutch size, incubation rhythm etc. However the damage caused to the first clutch by large grey babblers and to the replacement clutch by the heavy gale and rains that lashed the city on 30th and 31st resulting in the collapse of the nest dashed my hopes of observing the hatching time, feeding frequency and the development of the nestlings.

The pear-shaped pendulous nest looking like a lump of rubbish hanging from the tip of the citrus plant branch was hardly 5 ½ feet from my bedroom window, thus affording an excellent opportunity for close observation. Paper bits, cobwebs, fine fibre, cotton and woolly material formed the outer wall of the nest while the inner wall was made up of fine fibre and fluffy cotton. The bottom of the nest was carpeted with silky floss. The lateral entrance of the nest with a porch above was facing North and being located in a corner, the security environment was most congenial.

The nearest tree vegetation was on the northern side road margin consisting of Rain tree (*Samanea saman*), Coral tree (*Erythrina indica)*, Copper pod (*Peltophorum ferruginea)*, Purple Bauhinia (*Bahunia purpurea*), Indian laburnum (*Cassia fistula)* and Gulmohur (*Delonix regia).*

The area around the nest, which includes the primary and secondary perch, was obviously their territorial limits and no pair or individual of the same species was noticed in the neighbourhood.

The nest building operations appeared to have been completed and the only activity noticed during 18th and 19th was the finishing touches being given to the nest by the female bird. The male did not assist the female either in giving finishing touches to the nest or incubation. During this period of activity the female was observed to carry out characteristic stereotyped movements such as (1) pulling the fibre and silky floss with its beak inward over the rim of the entrance, (2) tucking it into the wall under its breast (3) drawing it alongside against the wall and shaping the bottom by squatting and using its body weight (4) finishing the inner wall and padding of the nest bottom by turning round and round inside, (5) pressing its head, tail against the rim and alternately pushing with one foot and then the other against the floor and inner sides and (6) turning frequently between and sometimes during the above movements.

Nest measurements

Length	: 23 cms	Distance from the nest	
Width in the centre	: 9 cms	to the ground	: 4 ½ feet
Inside depth	: 6 cms	to the ground	: 4 ½ feet

Pre-laying activity and nest occupation

(a) Behaviour of the bird : The primary perch is on the combined canopy of curry leaves (*Murraya koenigii* or *Curraway*) Sapota (*Achras zapota*), Citrus plant (*Citrus limon*) and Guava (*Psidium guajava*). The secondary perch on the lower branch of Citrus in the immediate vicinity of the nest afforded the bird an unhindered view of the nest and its entrance. It is mostly on this favourite secondary perch that the female bird vocalized and indulged in leisurely body preening. Before approaching the nest, it vocalized everytime on the primary and secondary perches and after flitting, descended on the nest. While leaving the nest it flew off directly and sometimes hopped on the citrus and sapota branches and vocalized infrequently.

The body language of the bird like turning its head sideways, up and down and making slight body movements indicated that it was about to leave the nest. The female bird did not appear to take notice of the presence of koels, tailorbirds and the flock of large grey babblers, which frequented the same canopy.

When I imitated its call under cover, it appeared to have been slightly agitated. The female hopped from branch to branch vocalizing for nearly one minute and finding no intruder in the vicinity flew to the nest.

(b) Ferrying the nesting material : On the 18th, 15 trips were made between 8.30 am and 4.30 pm ferrying nesting material such as cotton and silky floss, while on the 19th, 11 trips were made between 9.30 am and 12.35 pm. At 9.45 am it brought a fairly large chunk and fluffy white material, which it tried to insert through the entrance. Having failed to do so, the bird took the material back on to the compound wall, tore it into small shreds and deposited them inside the nest in two trips. Between 1.55pm and 3.00 pm the bird was seen removing the excess of silky floss and discarding it outside the compound wall.

(c) Visits by male and female birds : On 19th the male visited the nest four times accompanied by the female on two occasions. During the first visit the male conducted an internal inspection of the nest along with the female, presumably to familiarize with nest location for it would undertake feeding of the young nestlings after hatching. During the other visits the male popped its head into the nest to make sure of internal security. The visits of the female were short and random in order to ensure that everything was fine with the nest including the security environment. After the first clutch was laid, the male visited only once to have a look at the eggs to see that all was well with the clutch. That the female bird frequented the nest for incubation at intervals of 2 to 15 minutes which indicated that it was in the vicinity.

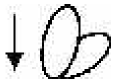
Nest occupation

The female did not occupy the nest during the nights between the 18th and 21st, though it was making short visits off and on, ferrying nesting material and checking the security environment. The first occupation of the nest was on the 22nd after laying one egg of the first clutch and regular sitting commenced from the next day.

Egg laying and clutch size

First clutch. A greenish white egg marked with light shaded brown and grey patches was laid in the forenoon of the 22nd and within 24 hours the second egg was laid on the 23rd around 11.30 am. It is characteristic of many passerine birds to lay their eggs in the forenoon. (Skutch, 1952). The eggs were short and ovate in shape. While laying the second egg the bird would stay put in the nest for full five minutes.

Measurement of the eggs
Length : 11/2 cms Width : 3/4 cm Weight : 2.5 gms



Position of eggs

Note: Arrow indicates the direction of the nest entrance.

The position of the eggs presumably indicates that both flanks of each egg receive the body heat uniformly during the incubation period.

The bird found both the eggs damaged on the 26th, started sipping the liquid contents and ferried the broken shell pieces outside. After discarding them, the bird was actively engaged in nest sanitation.

Replacement Clutch. On the 28th one egg was laid around 11.30 am and hence a close watch was kept till 9.00 pm. However the female bird did not turn up though its call was heard from the canopy around 2.45 pm. The egg lay exposed throughout the day and night. The frequent presence of large grey babblers, which haunted the canopy presumably discouraged the bird from visiting or occupying the nest.

Nest temperature

No attempt was made to record the nest temperature for purposes of comparison with the ambient temperature lest the delicate eggs and the nest got damaged.

Incubation rhythm

The female commenced incubating the eggs from the 22nd night. Egg warming was fully observed on 24th and 25th.

Day 1 (23.07.2001)

The number of attentive period between 11.30 am and 5.27 pm was 12 times and that of the inattentive period between 11.20 am and 5.43 pm was 13 times. The coverage of attentive period ranged from 2 to 15 minutes, the longest being 2.38 pm to 2.53 pm. Inattentive period coverage ranged from 5 minutes to one hour and 15 minutes, the longest was between 11.35 am and 12.50 pm perhaps for foraging. The total duration of attentive period was 80 minutes while that of the inattentive period was 303 minutes and the average of both the periods was 6.66 : 23.3 minutes. (Fig. 1,5&6).

Day 2 (24.07.2001)

The number of period of attentiveness between 6.22 am and 6.15 pm was 31 times while that of inattentiveness between 6.16 am and 6.25 pm was 32 times. The attentive period ranged from one minute to 25 minutes, the longest was between 10.15 am and 10.40 am. Coverage of inattentive period ranged from one minute to 28 minutes, the longest was between 5.10 pm and 5.38 pm. The time duration of attentive period and inattentive period was 389:341 minutes while the mean of both the period was 12.54 minutes and 10.65 minutes respectively. (Fig. 2,5 and 6).

Day 3 (25.07.2001)

The number of attentive periods between 6.50 am and 6.00 pm was 35 times while that of inattentive period from 6.40 am to 6.12 pm was 16 times. The duration of attentive period ranged from one minute to 18 minutes; the longest was between 10.50 am and 11.08 am. The inattentive period duration ranged from 5 minutes to 25 minutes, the longest being 4.30 pm to 4.55 pm. The total duration of attentive period was 299 minutes while that of inattentive period was 393 minutes. The mean of both the periods was 8.54 minutes and 11.22 minutes respectively. (Fig. 3,5 &6).

Day 4: (26.07.2001)

The number of attentive periods between 6.50 am and 3.41 pm was 29 times while that of inattentive period between 6.40 am and 3.40 pm was 29 times. Attentive period duration ranged from one minute to 25 minutes, the longest was between 6.50 am and 7.15 am while that of inattentive period ranged from one minute to 20 minutes. The longest period of absence was between 1.40 pm and 2.00 pm. The total period of attentiveness was 289 minutes while that of inattentiveness was 252 minutes. The mean of both the periods was 9.95 minutes and 8.62 minutes respectively. (Fig 4,5 &6).

The duration of attentive period on the 23rd was less than that of inattentive period. However on the next day it showed an increase over the inattentive period. The bird kept the eggs covered 50.5% of the time duration of 12 hours. On the 25th the attentive period was 94 minutes less than that of inattentive period. The egg coverage was 42% of the time duration of 12 hours. Possibly the wet day marked by an off and on drizzle might have affected the egg coverage. The damage caused to the eggs on the 26th had obviously upset the incubation rhythm.

Possible cause of egg damage

The bird was noticed sipping the liquid contents for a total period of 49 minutes with frequent intervals between 3.52 pm and 5.09 pm. It ferried the broken pieces of eggshell between 5.10 pm and 5.15 pm and 5.20 pm and 5.25 pm for discarding outside. However the actual disposal site could not be pinpointed as the view was obstructed by the vegetation and compound wall. After discarding it was actively engaged in nest sanitation. The bird left the nest at 5.29 pm disturbed by the large grey babblers but did not return though its call was heard at 6.16 pm.

The vociferous and quarrelsome large grey babblers were fiercely fighting frequently on the branch right on the top of the nest and several times the female sunbird was reluctant to return to the nest. It was evident that the battling babblers had caused the egg damage.

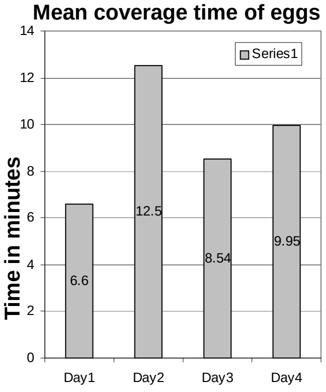
Nesting season

Writing about the nesting season in his "The Book of Indian birds" Dr. Salim Ali states that the season is not well defined (1941, 1964, 1979, 1996 editions) and that nests may be found in practically every month. (1941, First edition). Subsequently Dr. Salim Ali and Dillion Ripley (1987) have elaborated that there is increased breeding activity from March to May in Bengal and from February to April in Southern India with a second peak from July to September in the latter region where this species breeds freely after the monsoon. The specimens collected during the

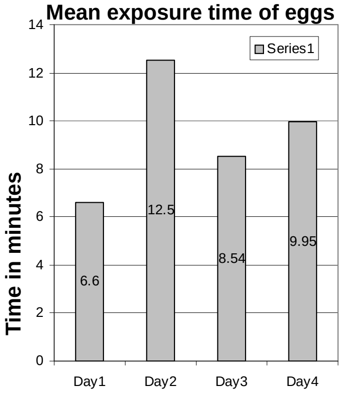
Hyderabad State Ornithological Survey by Salim Ali in October, 1925 and 1931 in Saifabad and Mannanur indicated that they were breeding in October also. Two specimens collected at Narasampet in December, 1931 showed that they had reverted to non-breeding. (Specimen Nos. 425 & 426). In Poona, Benjamin Aitken found eggs hatching in March while Douglas Dewar recorded number of nests in the same month in Madras. In the Konkan region, Salim Ali found breeding season between July to October. Dr. Bharucha stated that they frequently use period flanking the monsoon in March-April and July-August. Among many passerine birds two or more clutches a year are common (Otin sewall pettingill, Jr. 1985). Dr. Uttangi has concluded that the purple rumped sunbirds of the Western Ghats breed during Jan-February. There is however no reference to laying of the second clutch though mention is made of a second brood between July and September. I presume that the damage caused to the first clutch has prompted the bird to lay a replacement clutch.

Important observations

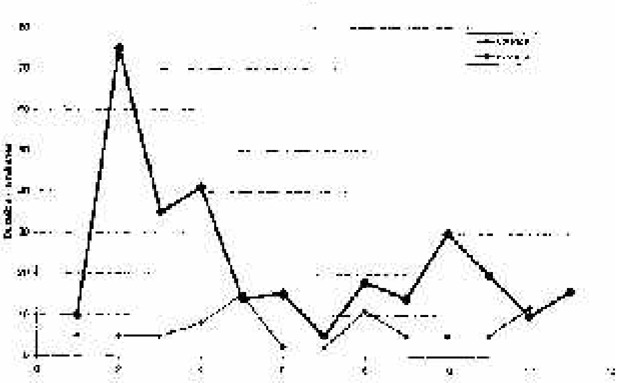
1. The female bird has a red iris while the male has a brown iris.
2. The female bird has utilized two days to give final touches to the nest.
3. It made short visits off and on for two days before egg laying to make sure about the suitability or otherwise of the nest and the surrounding security environment for raising a successful brood.
4. After the first clutch was damaged, one egg was laid on the second day.
5. The female bird does not appear to have been under stress after discovery of damaged eggs and it went about cleaning the nest and laying the replacement clutch.
6. The male bird was seen only once after the first clutch was laid and it never turned up when the damage to the eggs was discovered.



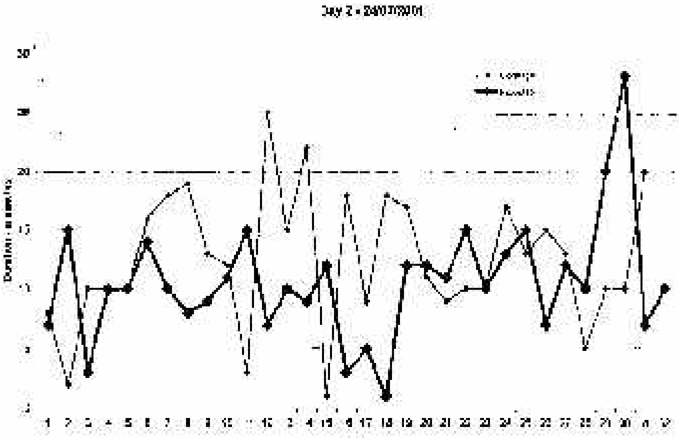
Figures 5



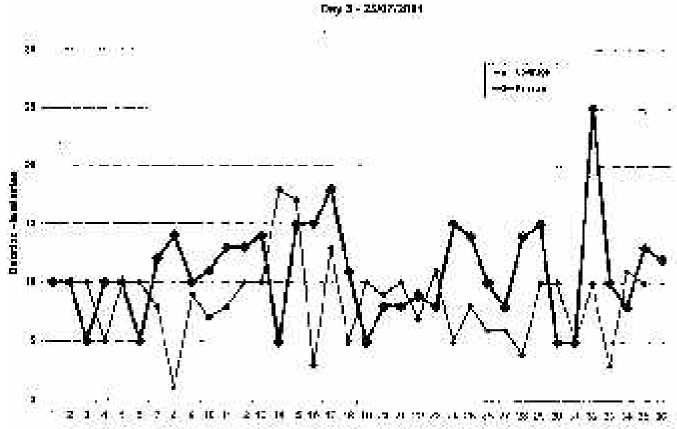
Figures 6



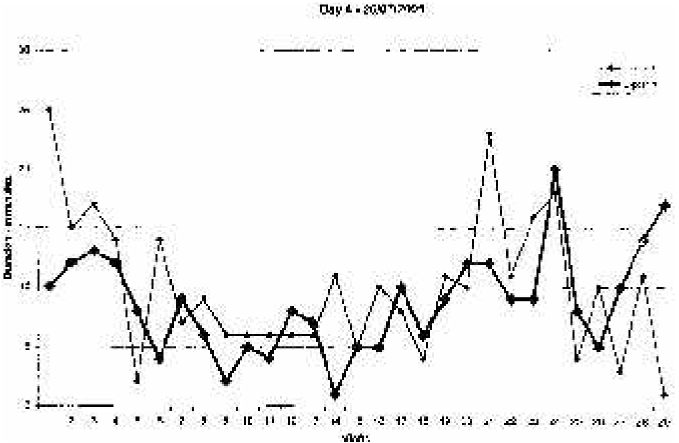
Figures 1



Figures 2



Figures 3



Figures 4

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Conservation of the Avifauna of Anshi National Park (India)

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Mainly, to get acquainted with and to assess the prevailing condition of the flora and bird fauna of the Anshi National Park, a preliminary survey on was conducted on 27th December 1993 by the writer, prior to the actual launching of the regular 1994 project. The survey was funded by the U.K. based Oriental Bird Club (OBC) for making an intensive study of bird community in the Park covering all seasons. While the results and the bird account of this 1994 survey are being published elsewhere, the present article deals with the distribution pattern of bird species and diversity of vegetation and more especially the conservation perspectives and management activities at present in force in the National Park. During journey, the officials of the Forest Dept. of Dandeli (Wildlife) accompanied us. An attempt is made at the end, suggesting a few points for improvement in the Park.

Itinerary : Located at about 106 km from Dharwad town along Karwar road, the Anshi National Park in Uttar Kannada District can be reached within 2 ½ hours. The sixty kilometers road journey between Dharwad and Dandeli is through a landscape, which is open and cultivated of which, the first 20 kilometers being almost treeless, was skipped over during the still dark and chill early morning hours of December. The remaining area between Halyal and Dandeli is an edge to Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary. On the ground and among scattered trees in the fields and along the roadsides, we saw rose-ringed parakeet, iora, purple-rumped sunbird, jungle myna, spotted dove, grey jungle fowl, white-breasted waterhen, common grey hornbill, orange-headed ground thrush, coucal, small green beeeater, redwhiskered bulbul, magpie robin, black drongo, honey buzzard etc. These small patches of scrub and tree habitats, we felt, also need protection, as they were important for maintaining a balance in the density of population of both Dandeli Sanctuary as well as Anshi National Park. We left Dharwad at about 5.30 a.m. and reached Dandeli around 8.00 a.m. after doing some birding on the way. The DFO in charge of the Park and his veteran guides joined us and as we were driving out of the Forest Depot we saw in the leafy branches of a huge *Terminalia balerica* tree, a lone member of verditer flycatcher (*Eumyias thalassina)* hawking winged insects. It marked the arrival of wintering birds into the border areas of the National Park of Anshi. The park itself is about 46 kilometers away from Dandeli Head Office and can be reached within an hour either by driving via Kulgi-Potoli asphalted road or by driving along half asphalted and half Jeepable rough-road via Kumbarwada-Ulvi cross-Anshi road.

After a short discussion on the survey project with the DFO we drove along Kulgi-Potoli road and reached the Naxaries around 10 a.m. The observatory developed there for attracting tourists to observe elephants, deer and peafowl, for aesthetics and the Kulgi Nature Camp specially maintained for conducting Nature Camps for School and College students on Wildlife Education are to be esteemed highly as they enhance the importance of conservation of wildlife. A Professor who had camped there to study the flora of the area showed us a rare orchid *Dendrobium* which he had collected from *Randia dumetorium* tree, the fruits of which are used by fishermen to narcotize fish. As we drove through the forests of Dandeli Joida and Kumbar-wada, we noted down at intervals, the vegetation, which was mostly moist-deciduous, mixed with teak and bamboo. Many roadside trees, which were wooded and tall, and some standing dead close to the road, had attracted birds of the woodpecker family *Picidae.* Foraging on trunks and branches near Potoli cross, we saw an adult male white-bellied black wood pecker (*Dryocopus javensis)* and a speckled piculet (*Picumnus innominatus)* and also a male with orange-red forecrown. Conservation of these relic population of woodpeckers, including the heart-spotted woodpecker (*Hemicircus canente)* the management should take special measures to see that every such tree within the park or adjoining it, is carefully protected.

In some open areas a thick growth of *Eupetorium* weed had replaced grass and as such the DFO who was with us said it has greatly affected fodder supply to village cattle. Attempts are being made to control its fast growth. Around noon, we crossed the semi-evergreen junction of Ulvi near Potoli and came on top of a hill overlooking the backwaters of Supa reservoir, engulfing an area of nearly 20,000sq. hectares of bamboo forest formerly used by elephant herds of Anshi and Dandeli. We drove further and at about 1.00pm we touched the border of Anshi National park marked by Kaneri river along the bank of which tree species like *Glychosmis pentaphylla, Vitex leucoxylon, Ficus nervosa, Dalbergia volubilis* were found. A small population of diverse species of bird flock, consisting of residents like whitethroated fantail (*Rhipidura albicollis),* black drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus),* Asian paradise flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi)* and puffthroated babbler (*Pellorneum ruficeps)* were foraging in the thickets. On a tall treetop, near the bridge, a member of the whitecheeked barbet (*Magalaima viridis),* was perched and it was giving out its loud ‘kutroo’ ‘kutroo’ calls that went resounding through the forest endlessly.

Just 5 kilometers from this Kaneri bridge lies the Anshi village occupying almost of central place in the National Park, about 250 sq. km in area. The park was once part of the huge Dandeli wildlife Sanctuary, in Western Ghats located between 14°53’ and 15°-31’ North latitude and 74°-15’ and 74°-32’ east longitude, covering forest ranges of Kumbarada, Ulvi and Gund, that are extremely rugged and highly precipitous with hill altitudes varying between 400-700 meters. The southern side is marked by the river Kali and the northern side by Belgaum. The rivers are perennial but the canals dry up during the dry season causing a lot of problems for wildlife, especially bison, tiger, deer and sambar. The entire area is full of thick forest mostly semi-ever-green to ever-green with top canopy more than 50 feet high representing tree families such as *Myrtaceae, Utricaceae, Tiliaceae, Guttiferae, Dipterocarpeceae, Lythraceae*; the middle strata less than 50 feet include families like *Melastomaceae, and Rabiaceae* and shrubs about 10 feet high which include *Vitaceae, Palmae, Myrsinaceae* and others. Huge climbers are common, represented by *Gnetum ulva, Connarus wightii* and *Pothos* sp.; Quite a few plants of medicinal importance like *Rauwolfia serpentina, Rubia cordifolia* & *Dioscoria* sp. are also represented. In these canopies flycatcher like birds such as Malabar trogon (*Harpactes fasciatus)* & bluebeared bee-eater (*Nyctyornis athertoni)* were found feeding together. These rare species need protection including others like Malabar parakeet (*Psittacula columboides),* Malabar whistling thrush (*Myiophonus horsfieldii),* great pied hornbill (*Buceros bicornis),* Malabar pied hornbill (*Anthracoceros corontus),* yellow browed bulbul (*Iole indica),* Scimitar babbler (*Pomatorhinus horsefieldii),* Crimsonbacked sunbird (*Nectarinia minima).* Most of them are species that are endemic to the Western Ghats. To protect this unique flora and bird fauna coming under the 3rd project of Kali river the Anshi core area was declared as National Park in the year 1987. This core zone, the DFO said is still occupied by tribals belonging to Beadars (hunters) Halakki (agriculturists) & Kumris (cultivators). Further he added that the District of Uttarkannada has undergone exploitation causing serious ecological disturbance to the Western Ghats. About 1392 people and almost the same number of cattle are exclusively dependent on the forest for thatch, fodder and fuel wood. This is causing a lot of management problems he added.

We reached the Anshi PWD rest-house at about 2.30 pm and after a hurried lunch we drove towards the western border of the Park which runs along Goa border. On the way we saw the Tiger check dam constructed by the Kadra Block Development Dept. Near Goyar hamlet; pug marks of Tiger and other small herbivore were visible on the soft mud and a few birds like goldenbacked woodpecker, black bulbul, greenish warbler (wintering) & blossomheaded parakeet were encountered. Continuing our journey along the same Karwar road at 4.25 we reached the Bison Tank area where pole – like trees associated with *Calophyllum (*'surhonne') *Calamnus (*palm) *Myristica (*living fossil) were most peculiar. We saw a tree swift (crested) sitting upright on a dried twig. We drove back to join the main road and near the ghat level at about 5.30 p.m. we saw a group of emerald doves (4) scarlet minivets (3) small minivets (5) and a family of 6 grey jungle fowl. We returned to Kumbarwada via Kamshetadi where near a water spring we saw a pair of forest wagtails (*Dendronanthus indicus)* wintering in the National Park. What was most fascinating to watch was the to and fro movements of a group of hill mynas (*Gracula religiosa)* making a variety of squeaks as they rose on their wings and returned to the same perch on the tree now and then.

Conservation Perspectives:

Since Anshi National Park has limited forest area of only 250 sq.kms. it is vital that special care to protect endemic and endangered bird species from external threats resulting from dam construction, mining and road construction, dead wood extraction, either fallen or standing, including cattle grazing are given top priority in management activities. The 3 small hamlets near Goyar, Ambal and Kundal for the sake of Park's Wildlife safety along Goa border, should be closed and the tribals living there should be gradually rehabilitated. It needs the cooperation of the people. The water in the 2 tanks, meant for the bison and the tiger, does not stand during dry season. It can be temporarily solved by using suitable 'polyethylene' sheets at the bottom. It is quite appropriate that at present, the department of forest itself is catering to the forest-based needs of nearly 20 hamlets or villages having 234 families and their grazing cattle.

A few semi-evergreen patches near Kundapur, Potoli, Dund and Ulvi still need to be reallocated to the park area since many rare birds go there either for shelter or for foraging. This will help in maximizing the diversity, as well as population size in the National Park of Anshi. For proper management the Park should be classified into zones such as wilderness, species management, recreation etc. The present Anshi-Ulvi road is ideal for bird watching. Similarly the Nujji-Ajji areas, Dokreppa-Ambal cross, Barpoli cross, Khamshetadi (sacred gove), Amboli (Bamboo brake), Pavalahalla (causeway), Vakinala (Bank-vegetation) are some of the most important bird habitats for conservation action since rare species like shama, imperial pigeon, racket-tailed drongo, Tickell's blue-flycatcher, bluewinged parakeet, hill myna, piculets and others are regularly seen. As the lower ghats towards Kadra are fragile, care should be taken to stop all external threats to the conservation programmes. For protection measures, the ghat areas of Anshi and Kadra are important for the emerald dove and grey jungle fowl. A special study to assess the status of biological diversity of the lower groups of animals within the park area is most essential.

Acknowledgments : The author is grateful to the UK based Oriental Bird Club (OBC) for sanctioning funds to carry out the bird survey. Thanks are also due to Prof. M.V. Shivalingardhya of the Karnataka University for his help in identification of different plant species. Last, but not least I thank all the members of the staff DFO and RFO for kindly taking us round to show the different parts of the park. My special thanks are due to Sri. A.N. Yellappa Reddy IFS (Retd.) for his constant guidance

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Lalbagh Lake

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When I started out birdwatching in the mid-seventies as a schoolboy, and intensified my birdwatching effort in the late seventies and early eighties, the whole ambience was different. It was part of those times when Bangalore used to have its mist-laden mornings, and in winter, I remember, it would still be misty as late as eight in the morning. If one visited the lake very early in the morning, the birds were hardly visible because of the mist over the water. The mist would be so thick that for a small lake like that of Lalbagh, the opposite bank would often not be visible at all. The sun would be diffused, and it would only be much later in the morning that there would be some warm sunshine.

The lake had two small islands, which were thick with scrubby and reedy vegetation. These islands were isolated from the shore from God-knows-when and were serving as a small sanctuary space for waterbirds. Since it was cut off from the shore, people would not go over to it and there was no horticultural "maintenance" activity going on there. It was truly a wild growth. The shoreline of these islands used to be a haven for migrant Garganys which used to come to the lake in large numbers. During the mid-migratory winter season, some eight hundred ducks would be on the lake, often day roosting. Once I remember, a flock of another eight hundred birds came over, and seeing them, the eight hundred on the lake took flight, and some thousand six hundred ducks were milling over the lake for many minutes. Then the new flock left and the flock which took off from the water gradually settled back on the water. It was a surprise to me how such a small lake like that of Lalbagh could harbour so many birds and it still continues to fascinate me.

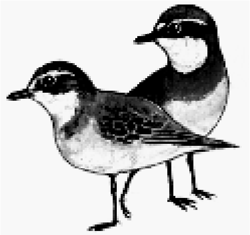
When the Department decided and started to connect up the islands with a land bridge, I jumped across a small yet to be filled gap in the land bridge and went on to the island. What immediately surprised me was the amount of humus and leaf litter which had accumulated on it. The whole litter was spongy, around a foot thick, and the lower layers quite black. During this time, even the spotbill ducks would breed in the lake and I have seen something like six chicks in tow swimming behind the mother.

The humification process was actively going on and it was quite an education for me on what isolation could do! All this was gone in a short time, and the Department converted the two islands into an extension of the park with just the same kind of plants and trees found elsewhere. The birds too disappeared and the Garganys stopped coming to the lake.

Information on the birds of Lalbagh goes back to the early seventies, when group birdwatching activity was started in Bangalore. The bird life of Lalbagh in the first half of the decade has been documented by Abraham and Chakravarthy and published in the Journal of the Mysore Horticultural Society. The bird species listed by them were higher than that for the latter half of the seventies. There has been a steady decline ever since in the number of species found in Lalbagh, and its lake.

The decade covering the late eighties and the early nineties marks the transition period in the change in the bird life of Lalbagh. The most marked change in the lake avifauna has been in the birds of the shoreline. The waders and reed birds like sandpipers and snipe, gave way to herons and cormorants from those birds which make use of the wet ground of the shoreline and the reeds, a transition of birds which make use of the trees bordering the water. Today a permanent presence is that of cormorants.

A little bit of sewage water getting into the lake has been good. Even when the ducks and other waders were in Lalbagh, the waters were eutrophic. This increased the plant productivity in the lake and encouraged the growth of macro-vegetation and fish. Even a fish eating Osprey and white-necked storks have been recorded in the lake in the seventies. The fencing off the lake was a good thing, ensuring fewer disturbances to the birds. The biggest threat, of course, still continues to be the only one thing: people! This is because Lalbagh continues to be an area for exercise and trivial recreation, and not an area for learning and study, like a botanical garden should be. A park it is, but botanic garden only in name!



Sighting of Albino Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* on Chilika Lake, Orissa

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Chilika, the designated Ramsar Site, is the world's second largest brackish water lagoon, lying between 19^{0} 28' and 19^{0} 54' N and between 85^{0} 05' and 85^{0} 38' E. The waterspread area of the lake varies from 1165 to 906 sq.km. during the monsoon and summer respectively. It is a paradise for migratory birds and a haven for resident breeding birds. More than 1,000,000 migratory birds winter here every year. Here we have been doing the bird survey work for the project entitled "Habitat evaluation of Chilika Lake with special reference to birds as bio-indicators" since February 2002. On 25.09.02 we were travelling from Balugaon to Satapada for our bird survey work. Satapada is located on the Eastern Shore of the Chilika Lake, bounded by the lagoon on three sides. On the way we reached Gurubai village just before Satapada at about 9.10 AM. The boatman drove the boat into a prawn bund canal. My field assistant told me that was a freshwater canal. From there the bird survey was started. Small waders namely Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Pacific Golden-Plover *Pluvialis fulva*, Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* and Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* were sighted scarcely. Suddenly Mr. Ali Hussain, an eminent and experienced bird trapper who is assisting me for bird trapping shouted excitedly "sir albino", "sir albino". Immediately the boat was stopped and I saw the area noticed by him. A pair of Lesser Sandplover was sighted on a prawn bund just 20 m. from our position. Among those two, one was purely white in colour. Like other birds, there was no darkish brown above and white below. There was no distinctive broad pale chestnut-red breast band and chestnut on nape, which are the predominant field characters of the species.

Unlike other birds it was pure milky white in colour except bill and legs. The bill was slightly greyish with black tip and the legs were black. We waited there for sometime to observe the behaviour of that bird. Meanwhile I tried to take a photograph of that bird. But the bird was restless and changing its position continuously. The exact geographical location of the area was 19^{0}.40588 N and 085^{0}.24680 E. It was marked with the help of Global Positioning System (GPS).

Albinism is the absence of melanin pigment in organisms. The cause of albinism is generally attributed to lack of activity of the enzyme tyrosinase, a key component of the pathway leading to the formation of melanin (White, et al. 1964). Pure or total albinos simply lack tyrosinase activity in the entire organism. Mechanisms leading to loss of tyrosinase activity in local regions of a bird's skin may be due to mutations or other known mechanisms of gene inactivation. Albino birds have been classified into four groups (Pettingill 1958). Total (or pure) albinos have a complete absence of melanin pigment in the entire bird. Incomplete albinos exhibit a lack of pigment in the plumage, eyes, or unfeathered parts, but not all three. Imperfect albinos have reduced or diluted pigment in one of these three areas. In individuals, which are classified into this third category, the pigment is never completely absent. The fourth class, partial albinos, exhibit total pigment loss from only a few feathers; the pigment-free areas may be symmetrical or asymmetrical. Pure albinos are very rare, constituting only 7% of the 1847 cases of albinism summarized by Gross (1965).

Lesser Sandplovers are medium to long distance migrant (Prater *et. al*., 1983). It is the commonest wader species of the Peninsular India and breeds in the high Himalayas (Ali and Ripley, 1983). Pure, incomplete, imperfect and partial albino characters have been recorded in passerine birds and in some duck species in the world. But, albinism in waders is very scarce. In India also pure and incomplete albinism have been reported mostly in passerine birds and there is no information about the albino character in migratory birds especially in waders. Similarly, there are no authenticated records of pure albino character in Lesser Sandplover so far in Indian wintering grounds.

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Status Survey on the Broad-tailed Grassbird in Karntaka

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Outline of the proposal

The broad-tailed Grass bird (*Schoenicola platyura)* is a species restricted to montane grasslands, principally in the Western Ghats and Nilgiri hills of southern India, occurring largely in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu (Birdlife International, 2001). This species is a bird of dense tall wet montane grasslands, bracken and reed fringes on steep hillsides and tops, including stretches of *Andropogon* grass and stunted date at least in the breeding season. Outside this time there is some indication that altitudinal movement occurs (Birdlife International, 2001). All along its range in the Western Ghats and the Nilgiris, this species has a small, severely fragmented range and population as a result of clearance and modification of grasslands. It has therefore been considered as Vulnerable (Birdlife International, 2001).

Although records show that species in Kerala and Tamil Nadu is relatively well represented, its occurrence in Karnataka is known only from four localities. Butler (1881) collected specimens of the species from Belgaum (Specimens in BMNH), while have reported it from Mudigere and Mercara. Unfortunately, the exact locality in Belgaum area where Butler (1881) collected his specimens is not known; the records of Uttangi (1994) and Chakravarthy and Tejasvi (1992) need to be validated as the habitats in these localities and where the species has been sighted is not typical. Uttangi (1994) recorded it in Anshi National Park and Chakravarthy and Tejasvi (1992). More recently, Shivananda (personal communications) has sighted the species at Kemmanugundi and Mullaingiri in the Bababudan Hills, mostly in hill top grasslands.

The present survey is being undertaken to survey and identify localities where the species might occur in Karnataka. The survey areas will be chosen based on the presence of suitable hilltop or shola grasslands habitat and select localities that match with the habitat characteristics preferred by the species (see Birdlife International, 2001). Such areas will be subjected to a more intense survey.

The areas selected for initial surveys include:

Bababudan Hills, Dandeli and Anshi National Park, BR Hills.

The survey of the above and additional localities will be taken up as and when funds become available.

Expected outcome:

At the end of the proposed survey, it is expected that;

1. There will be a better understanding of the status and distribution of the species in Karnataka
2. Priority areas of conservation will be identified within Karnataka
3. Threats to the species and its habitat will be better understood and a suitable management plan will be drawn for a long-term conservation of the species in Karnataka
4. Identification of areas, which look likely, but do not harbour the species. This can avoid duplication of futile surveys by other scientists in future.

Budget : Rs. 15,000 being requested will be used mainly for travel and minimal daily field expenditure of the project team.

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Birding at Kaziranga National Park

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Kaziranga National Park, in Assam is one of the significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity of universal value. This cradles one horned Indian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) and variety of other wildlife including some threatened species of animals, birds and plants. It is also an outstanding example of ongoing ecological and biological process in the evolution and development of wetland ecosystem. The Kaziranga National Park area was formed by silt deposition of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. In course of time this area has been evolved into vast alluvial grassland (66%) interspersed with patches of tropical mixed moist deciduous forest (28%) and number of water bodies. There are grasses growing up to 7 meters. *Saccharum, Phragmitis, Erianthus* are the dominant species, which are collectively known as the elephant grass. Amidst the grasses there are trees *like Bombax ceiba, Dillenia indica, Careya arborea* and *Emblica officinalis*. The wet evergreen forests harbors species like *Talauma hodgsonii, Garcinia tinctoria, Ficus rumphii, Cinnamomum bejolghota and Syzigium* species. This National Park also supports Asiatic Wild Buffaloes (*Bubulas bubalis*), Eastern Swamp Deers (*Cervus duvauceli*), Tigers (*Panthera tigris*), Asiatic Elephants (*Elephus maximus*), Hog deers (*Axis procinus*), variety of fishes and birds. These values made Kaziranga National Park to get inscribed in the world heritage site list in 1985. Kaziranga was declared as a reserve forest in 1908, as wildlife sanctuary in 1950, and finally as a National Park in 1974. Numerous water bodies constitute rich reservoir of food and thousands of migratory birds representing over hundred species visit the parks seasonally during winter. A total of 478 species has been recorded (M. Barua and P. Sharma, 1999) including 25 globally threatened species like Swamp Francolin (*Francolinus gularis*), Bengal Florican (*Houbaropsis bengalensis*), Palla's Fish Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucoryphus*), Spot billed Pelican (*Pelicanus insignis*), Lesser Adjutant (*Leptoptilos javanicus*) and 21 nearly threatened species.

It was a pleasant moment for me when I visited Kaziranga National Park for two days along with Prof. Madhav Gadgil and seven more ecologists. The morning sun of 11th November 2003 was peeping from the clouds to welcome us to the land of rhinos. It was Dr. Sálim Ali's birthday. My friends back in Bangalore had decided to meet for the bird count, but I made a mental sketch to the birding in Kaziranga. We had geared ourselves to be in midst of this wilderness for two days. The group was more interested to have an understanding of the landscape and the bio diversity harboured by it on the first day. As we studied the landscape, our thoughts were crossed with the next day's sojourn into the rhinos' land for which I had been waiting for a long time.

Padmini, the elephant, aged about 45 years readily consented to take us deep in to the jungle, near the rhino habitats. It is extremely difficult to tread either on foot or on a vehicle to go in to the marshy grasslands. Padmini had no hassles doing it on her foot.

The wildlife was hidden behind the grass, growing 7 metres, though we sighted few wild buffaloes behind the thickly grown grasses. In the beginning, the weather was foggy and cleared as the sun ascended. In the North East, the sun rises one and half-hour early and sets in similar pre-timings. At few places the swamps would sink about 3 feet under the pachyderm's limbs. Pavan, the mischievous calf followed his mother very obediently continually with his pranks. Kasim Ali, the mahout was very knowledgeable about the landscape, wildlife, and interrelation. He named many birds in English and described their morphology. He pointed to a place in swamp where the Bengal Floricans was together with Lesser Adjutant, Large Egret and other birds.

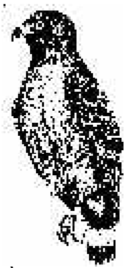
The call of hoolock gibbons pierced the tranquility of the jungle. Elephants skittered away into the deeper jungle before we could get closer to the group. I believe the smell of humans spilt the beans.

Ali, vividly recollected an incidence in which elephant padmini's first calf named as "Sheeba" was gored to death by an irate Rhino, Sheeba was only 2 years old, when she succumbed to the rhino attack. A group of large egrets were fishing in the swamps and would sit on the rhino's back for rest. Lesser Adjutants were silently moving at the periphery of the water bodies. Rosy Pelicans, Darters, Little Cormorants, Spot bills waded and fished in the water bodies. We sighted 28 Rhinos, 15 Wild Buffalos, 3 wild Asiatic Elephants, 15 Swamp Deers, and a good number of Hog Deers.

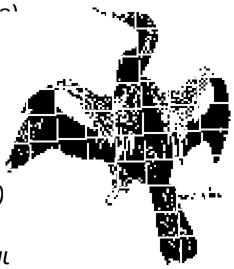
After an hour's ride, Padmini took us back to the destination and hurried off to have her morning snacks. I offered few bananas to Pavan for his company and also appreciated Ali's knowledge and thanked him. Later, we went into the thickly forested areas in a vehicle with the Deputy Conservator of Forests, R. K. Das, hoping to sight Hoolock Gibbons. But the hoolock gibbons were elusive, instead a Malayan Squirrel (*Ratufa bicolor)* presented itself before us. Meanwhile we could come across 48 species of birds, many of which are restricted to North Eastern region. Few to mention are the Indian Redbreasted Parakeet *(Psittacula alexandri),* Indian Drongo Cuckoo *(Surniculus lugubris),* Green Magpie *(Cissa chinensis)*, and Himalayan Treepie (*Dendrocitta formosae*). The forest of North East, floristic and faunistic diversity is remarkable and at the same time confuses naturalists. We could come across 62 species of birds of which only 49 could be identified due to fog and thick canopy. The entire trip had a memorable birding with lot of curiosity about species distribution and unique landscapes.

List of bird sighted during the trip:

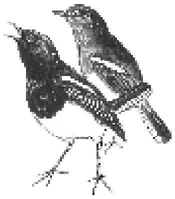
1. Indian Redbreasted Parakeet *(Psittacula alexandri)*
2. Spotted Dove *(Streptopelia chinensis)*
3. River Tern *(Sterna aurantia)*
4. Marsh Sandpiper *(Tringa stagnatilis)*
5. Spotted Sandpiper *(Tringa glareola)*
6. Redwattled Lapwing *(Vanellus indicus)*
7. Bronzewinged Jacana *(Metopidius indicus)*
8. Red Junglefowl *(Gallus gallus)*
9. Swamp Partridge *(Francolinus gularis)*
10. Whitebacked Vulture *(Gyps bengalensis)*
11. Pallas's Fishing Eagle *(Haliaeetus leucoryphus)*



12. Crested Serpent Eagle *(Spilornis cheela)*
13. Brahminy Kite *(Haliastur Indus)*
14. Black Kite *(Milvus migrans)*
15. Marsh Harrier *(Circus aeruginosus)*
16. Spotbill Duck *(Anas poecilorhyncha)*
17. Pintail *(Anas acuta)*
18. Lesser Adjutant *(Leptoptilos javanicus)*
19. Whitenecked Stork *(Ciconia episcopu*
20. Openbill Stork *(Anastomus oscitans)*
21. Pond Heron *(Ardeola grayii)*
22. Large Egret *(Ardela alba)*
23. Grey Heron *(Ardea cinerea)*
24. Rosy Pelican *(Pelicanus onocrotalus)*
25. Little Cormorant *(Phalacrocorax niger)*
26. Darter *(Anhinga rufa)*
27. Indian Drongo Cuckoo *(Surniculus lugu*
28. Crow Pheasant *(Centropus sinensis)*
29. Whitebreasted Kingfisher *(Halcyon smyrnensis)*
30. Bluejay *(Coracias benghalensis)*



31. Blackheaded Oriole *(Oriolus xanthornus)*
32. Whitebellied Drongo *(Dicrurus caerulescens)*
33. Greyheaded Myna *(Sturnus malabaricus)*
34. Indian Myna *(Acridotheres tristis)*
35. Jungle Myna *(Acridotheres fuscus)*
36. Pied Myna *(Sturnus contra)*
37. Green Magpie *(Cissa chinensis)*
38. Himalayan Treepie *(Dendrocitta formosae)*
39. House Crow *(Corvus splendens)*
40. Raven *(Corvus corax)*
41. Jungle Crow *(Corvus macrorhynchos)*
42. Blackheaded Bulbul *(Pycnonotus atriceps)*
43. Tailor Bird *(Orthotomus sutorius)*
44. Magpie Robin *(Copsychus saularis)*
45. White Wagtail *(Motacilla alba)*
46. Large Pied Wagtail *(Motacilla maderaspatensis)*
47. House Sparrow *(Passer domesticus)*
48. Spotted Munia *(Lonchura punctata)*
49. Redwhiskered Bulbul *(Pycnonotus jocosus)*



REVIEW

IMPORTANCE OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FROM ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE. Dr. H.S.A. YAHYA.

The author of this work is the Head of the Zoology Dept. of Aligarh University. With painstaking accuracy. Dr. Yahya has gone through piles of source material about Islam for references to the world of nature- combing through the Quran, the sayings of the Prophet and from the works of Sufi saints. All this adds up to an impressive body of advice on the importance of treating the natural world with respect. “Though at the time the Quran was revealed … words like biodiversity, conservation, balance of nature etc. etc. were not propounded, there are several reference which carry exactly the same meanings. Nor are there any fanciful or unproven facts about the habits of animals - all of them whether taken or not to be an accepted as useful co-inhabitants of the earth. The only animals from which Islam is abjured to distance itself were pigs and dogs, on the understandable grounds that, in those times and conditions, both the species were hazards to human health.

In spite of all this, however Muslims have not always been good conservationists. A depleting houbara population has not stopped falconry among Arabs.

ABSTRACT

DISAPPEARANCE OF SPARROWS. *URUJ SHAHID, Green Pigeon Nature Society, Shivaji Square, Chandrapur 442402, Maharashtra*

According to Salim Ali “Mynas make their nest in a hole in a tree, wall or ceilling”. Now in our concrete walls it is difficult to make a hole, so the mynas have changed their habits and make nests even on electric pylons, dangerously close to a current of 11,000 volts.

But the house sparrows have not been able to adapt themselves to the changing conditions and are unable to breed. They will have to modify their habits or become extinct.

CORRESPONDENCE

FOUR PONDS IN THE ALIBAGH TALUKA (RAIGADH DISTRICT, MAHARASHTRA). *IRMELA FUTEHALLY, 403, NIPPON APTS., JUHU TARA ROAD, MUMBAI 400 049.*

Alibagh, I was told, once a picturesque district town has now little beauty to show except perhaps in my eyes alone. A fair sized pond overgrown with reeds and city fifth and almost stagnant water still has an amazing number of beautiful birds. Here is a list of some I saw in May 2003.

Pheasant-tailed and bronze-winged jacanas in breeding plumage are a lovely sight. They have, apparently their own ecological needs and do not compete with each other. They are often seen close together. A crake (possibly Indian blue-breasted banded rail) Egrets, cattle, large middle and median, a pair of spot-billed ducks, cotton teals, little grebe, pond herons, little cormorants, red-wattled lapwings, etc.

Ten kilometers North of Alibagh is Kihim (about which our Editor has written so often). Till five years ago the Kihim Pond used to be a haven for birds and their watchers alike. At the same time the women from the village and the Dhobi used it for washing their clothes and the birds did not object to their presence. In fact for some years the Forest Dept had designated it as a Bird Sanctuary. Now unfortunately the village panchayat has leased it out to fisherman for Rs. 30,000 per year and the reeds and water lilies so important for water birds have been removed, and the birds have vanished. This incidentally is the tank where Salim Ali did his famous research on the breeding biology of baya weaver birds.

The species which have disappeared recently include : Purple heron, the two species of jacanas, coots, little grebes and several species of duck. A pond which was so full of life has now a forlorn look.

Just a kilometer from this village pond is a small artificial water hole which dries up after the monsoon but in the wet season it is a revelation. Here is a list of birds I had seen last year: white breasted (not white-throated I hate changing old established names) king-fisher, common and pied kingfisher, white-breasted water hen, night heron, pond heron, small and median egret, white-browed and red-whiskered bulbul, purple-rumped sunbird, little cormorant, redshank, common sandpiper, drongo (perhaps both the grey and the black), common green bee-eaters, redwattled lapwing, Grey wagtail, common grey hornbills (with their casques on the bill), common and jungle myna, golden oriole.

I might mention that an illicit liquor brewer has established himself at this pond and I suspect that because of his activities a lot of insects are attraced by his operation and the birds like the insects.

Finally, let us have a look at a comparatively undisturbed water body at Sasone. What I mean by undisturbed is that the activites of the humans, washing clothes and netting fish are in one corner of the tank and most of the area is left undisturbed for the birds. The natural vegetation too is not cut or uprooted. Apart from the birds mentioned in the other tanks, there are blackwinged stilts, ducks, whistling teals, snipe, wagtails and pipits and several others. Apart from the birds this year the pond provided a glorious sight in the way three kinds of water lilies and lotuses which bloomed in stages. Sasone in all seasons providing us with great pleasure.

INDIAN KOEL. *S ASHOK KUMAR, Hyderabad*

The Indian koel, (both male and female) was seen feeding on the berries of *Murraya koenigii* (Curryleaves plant) in my backyard garden. For the first time I have observed this type of feeding.

VIRGINIA'S ANNOYING VULTURES. *JAMES DAO, INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUTE, 12 August, 2003*

The day the vultures arrived here was a moment made for Hitchcock.

No one can say why they came. No one really saw them arrive. They were just there one morning last November, sitting in pine trees near the center of town. Hundreds of them. Black, beady-eyed and slightly menacing. Smelly, too. Roadkill smelly.

“It would take your breath away,” said Thomas Adams, a local farmer whose girlfriend lived across from the vulture roost. “A barnyard smelled clean by comparison. They smelled like, well, dead animals.”

Every day for five months, city officials battled to uproot the roost, exploding fireworks, spraying the vultures with water and finally chopping down trees. Nothing seemed to work. And then, as suddenly and weirdly as they had arrived, the vultures left, scattering one March morning like huge flocks of steroid-fed starlings.

But they did not go far. Many of them are now in some woods nearby, nesting and lurking, and local officials expect them to try to retake the town in the autumn. If they do return, the police intend to be ready with something more potent than a song: traps, and may be shotguns.

“We've got to do something, because they'll be back,” said David Fields, a former marine who is the Animal Control Officer for Radford, an Appalachian city of 17,000 in the New River Valley.

As development spills into rural areas across southern Virginia, vultures aggressive, ugly, unappreciated, have joined white-tailed deer, coyotes, raccoons and skunks on the list of animals unwelcome in the suburbs.

Many ornithologists say Virginia has the second-largest vulture population east of the Mississippi, after Florida. Thanks largely to federal protection, the number is growing, though estimates are in dispute. Federal officials have put the number as high as 100,000. Conservationists place it lower.

As vultures have multiplied, they have also spread into suburbs and even cities. Vultures, it turns out, like being near people, with all the roadkill, livestock and landfills. “It is one of the side products of urbanization, just like storm runoff and air-quality degradation,” said Bryan Watts, Director of Center of Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. Several Virginia communities have roosts with 1,000 birds or more. Radford's is among the largest.

More vultures mean more complaints. In 1990, the Department of Agriculture's office of Wildlife Services in Virginia received only two complaints of property damaged by vultures. By 2001, the number had ballooned to 174, propelling vultures to third on the destructive-animal list, behind beavers and Canada geese.

The complaints have ranged from the grisly to the bizarre. Vultures are known to swoop down on newborn calves and lambs, peck their eyes out and even kill their mothers. From 1997 to 2001, vultures killed or wounded 392 farm animals, costing farmers $133,305, the Wildlife Services Office reported last autumn. Black vultures are considered the main culprits, with less aggressive turkey vultures a milder nuisance.

The vultures have also attacked property, officials say, tearing off roof shingles, tractor seats and windshield wipers. Their droppings on transmission towers have caused power failures. For reasons that ornithologists have not figured out, vultures seem to be attracted to plastic and rubber items, like window gaskets and sheathing on power lines.

At a boat landing south of Richmond, complaints about vulture damage to boats and cars became so common that the federal government killed nearly 400 birds there last year. But local officials say more than 200 birds have returned this summer.

Then there is the psychic damage. Martin Lowney, the Director of Federal Wildlife Services in Virginia, said a family in southwestern Virginia complained that vultures were perched on their father's gravestone everytime they visited the cemetery. A woman reported that when she walked into a hospital room to receive counseling about cancer, two vultures alighted on the window ledge outside. “She lost it,” Lowney said.

Citing such anecdotes, and concerns about the birds as nuisances, the Department of Agriculture asked the US and Wildlife Service last autumn for permission to kill as many as 4,000 black and turkey vultures in Virginia. The request has been reduced to 1,300; the application is pending.

The birds are protected under a 1918 law that restricts the killing of birds that migrate across national borders. Vultures once migrated between the United States and Latin America, though most of them in Virginia no longer travel more than a few hundred miles, experts said.

Conservationists and ornithologists have accused the Agriculture Department of exaggerating vulture damage. The wildlife service has been steadily killing more vultures – 562 last year from zero in 1997 – and critics contend that killing more than 1,000 birds in one year could decimate the birds in Virginia. They have demanded the government to conduct a detailed census before allowing more to be killed.

“They are consistently trying to scare people by telling them vultures can be vectors for human disease,” said Gerald Winegrad, Vice President for policy at the American Bird Conservancy, a national group. “In fact, vultures are demonstrated in studies to reduce disease transmission. They are nature’s garbagemen.”

The Agriculture Department however, says that vulture vomit and droppings may contain pathogens. James Fraser, a Professor of Wildlife Science of Virginia Tech, a few miles from Radford, said that vultures breed relatively late in life, and that killing large numbers of adults could devastate the overall population. He recommends dispersing vultures by curtailing their food supply, through better disposal of dead livestock, game and pets.

“Let’s try to manage these things by finding out what is providing their food,” he said, “It’s not all roadkill possum.”

The New York Times

CANNIBALISM IN BLACK-NECKED STORKS (EPHIPPIORHYNCHUS ASIATICUS) AND ITS POSSIBLE EFFECT ON THE POPULATION OF THE SPECIES IN INDIA.

Dr. GOPINATHAN MAHESWARAN, Scientist, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill Hose, S.B. Singh Road, Mumbai 400023.

Many of the reported occurrence of cannibalism in mammals and birds are anecdotal in nature, or have been casually observed in confined laboratory populations. However, sufficient evidence is available from natural populations in the field to indicate that cannibalism in a normal phenomenon in many different animal species, including birds. Among birds, cannibalism has been observed is the family Ciconiidae and in India it has been reported for woolly-necked stork *Ciconia episcopus* (Ishtiag, 1998) but this behaviour has never been reported for the black-necked stork. However, Ishtiag had also seen both woolly-necked stork and the black-necked stork throwing the dead chicks out of their nests in Keoladeo National park, Rajasthan, where both the species breed.

Incidents of passive cannibalism in black-necked stork was noticed inn Dudwa National Park (28° 18’ & 28° 42’ N and 80° 28’ & 80° 57’ E), India on 31 October 1996 around 14h30 while observing the breeding behaviour of the black-necked stork in Kheima-gauri of Bankatti range. The nest was placed on a 25m tall *Adina cordifolia* tree situated amidst a tall grassland habitat dominated by *Saccharum munja, Imperata cylindrica* and *Desmostachy bipinnata* close to the Nepal border. No other tree was present within a radius of 25m.

Around 19-21, October 1996 the chicks (N=3) must have hatched and the one that was consumed by the male black-necked stork was roughly 10 days old and was already dead. It must have died on 30 october 1996. The remaining chicks were raised successfully by the adult storks after one of the chicks was cannibalized by the male black-necked stork. The size of the chick was similar to hen’s chick with white feathers. I saw the adult bird gulping the whole chick and it did not try to mutilate the chick before swallowing it. I hypothesize that the cannibalism (passive) in black-necked storks might have evolved while adult birds tried to supplement their diet with dead young of their own when food availability was scrace. Because, birds like black-necked stork require (body weight of BNS is c. 6kg) fish of almost 960 g/day i.e. 16% of their body weight (Maheswaran and Rahmani, 2002). However, breeding adult storks may have to collect more fish to take care of themselves as well as to provide the young birds with enough fish. As this was the situation, competition for food among adult Black-necked storks also increased even when they were on the nest thereby affecting the juveniles. On many occasions I have noticed that when any one of the parent birds decided to give food to the juveniles the other adult bird on the nest tried to pilfer the food from its partner. This unusual competition for food among adults resulted in sarvation of chicks sometimes for hours together. Subsequently, this could have resulted in the death of one of the chicks as adults were not able to give it the required food.

If this behaviour is very common among storks and especially in blacknecked storks, this could at one stage even affect the already depleted population of the species. Thus, conservation of potential foraging sites so as to give them enough food is very vital and protection of nesting areas and nesting trees is important in order to have a healthy population of the black-necked storks. Further, more studies are needed to understand the complete breeding behaviour to know the exact egg-laying dates, how many eggs are laid, hatching success, hatching survival and dispersal of young birds.

The population of the black-necked storks has declined in the whole of India (Rahmani, 1989) except a few states where they are thriving well both within and outside the protected areas (Sundar, 2003). They are highly territorial and pair bondage is strong among adult storks and breeding takes places once in a year especially during the pre-monsoon period. However, it is not necessary that they should breed every year as this depends on various factors; from the monsoon to the amount of human activities. The prolonged scarcity of food especially during the breeding season, may change the present evolutionary trait from passive to active (kronism).

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NOTES FROM SRIHARIKOTA.

S. SIVAKUMAR and RANJIT MANAKADAN, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, S.B. Singh Road, Mumbai 400 023.

Brahminy kite chasing Koel

During field studies in Sriharikota Island, we sighted a male Asian koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* flying into an open patch of forest. Seeing this, a brahminy kite *Haliastur indus* alighted from a palm tree, c. 50m away from the starting point of the koel's flight and chased it. When the koel took to the cover of some bushes, the kite waited at a nearby tree and again and again pursued the koel when it came out into the open. The chase ended after the koel escaped into the cover of thick vegetation.

The brahminy kite feeds on a variety of small animals including mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, arthropods, carcasses, crustaceans, shellfish, cuttlefish (del Hoyo et al 1994). Among birds it is reported to prey on young and sickly birds (Ali & Ripley 1987). Aggressive hunting of larger and healthy prey have been reported on bats (Manakadan & Natarajan 1992). Our record of a pursuit of a healthy Asian koel by the species again shows that the brahminy kite does not exclusively prey on small, younger, sickly animals.

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Spangled Drongo

The distribution of the Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus hottentittus* (earlier known as the Hair-crested Drongo) in the Indian subcontinent is from the Himalayan foothills, N.E. India. Bangladesh and down to the Eastern and Western Ghats (Ali& Ripley 1987, Grimmet *et al* 1999, Kazmierczak 2000). There have been stray records of the species outside these areas, Kutch (Himmatsinhji 1997), Hyderabad (Pittie 1997) and Point Calimere (Natarajan and Balasubramaniam1990). In this communication, we report another instance of the sighting of the species outside its normal distributional range, i.e. Sriharikota Island, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh.

On 14/6/2002 while conducting regular land bird census in Sriharikota, under a BNHS project, a pair of Spangled Drongos was sighted at the edge of an eucalyptus plantation. The long, down - curved bill and upturned corners of the lower part of the tail easily differentiates this species from other drongos. The spangled drongo was not reported in two other BNHS projects carried out in Sriharikota in the 1970s (BNHS 1976) and the 1990s (Samanth and Rao 1996; Rao 1989). Additionally, this is the only record of the species in the more than a year of on-going field visits during the current project. The scarcity of the sighting of this species in Sriharikota suggests that the birds are probably 'summer vagrants' from the Eastern Ghats, which run about 100 km to the west of Sriharikota Island.

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SIGHTING OF RED DATA BOOK SPECIES (RDB) IN BUXA TIGER RESERVE DURING 1998-2001.

S. SIVAKUMAR, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, S.B. Singh Road, Mumbai 400 023

Buxa Tiger Reserve (20°30' & 26°55'N and 89°20' and 89°55'E) is located in the north-eastern corner of Jalpaiguri district, West Bengal. The Reserve spreads over an area of 76km^2 with tropical moist deciduous forest as major vegetation type. The elevation ranges from 60 to 1750 m. Temperature ranges from minimum of 8°C and maximum of 37°C and the average annual rainfall is 4100 mm. There are five Red Data Book (RDB, IUCN) species sighted during a study on birds in the reserve during 1998-2001.

1) Lesser Adjutant-Stork *Leptoptilos javanicus*
   The species is listed as vulnerable. One pair was seen regularly in the Naratali wetalnd of the Reserve.

2) Indian White-backed Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*
   The species has been upgraded to critical because it has suffered an extremely rapid population decline, particularly across the Indian subcontinent in recent years. About 10 vultures were regularly seen in Balapara beat. Ten to fifteen vultures were regularly seen in dumping sites of Alipurduar.

3) Long-billed Vulture *Gyps indicus*
   This species are rare among three vulture species (Eurasian Griffon) seen in the reserve. Occasionally one or two long-billed vultures were seen with white-backed vultures at dumping sites around the reserve.

4) Chestnut-breasted Partridge *Arborophila mandellii*
   Red-breasted Partridge is placed as vulnerable species. The species was sighted once in Buxaduar-Rupam hills (Sivakumar & Prakash 2003).

5) Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*
   The Rufous-necked Hornbill qualifies as vulnerable because it has a small, rapid declining population as a result of destruction of ever green forest and hunting. The Rufous-necked Hornbill was seen twice in the Reserve. A pair was seen in hills near Jainty and a small group of four birds seen between Buxaduar and Rupam.

   Beside these, two more RDB species such as Black-necked crane *Grus nigricollis* (Sanyal 1995) and Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa* (Allen *et al.* 1996) were sighted in the reserve in recent years.

Acknowledgements

I express my sincere thanks to Dr. Vibhu Prakash, BNHS for his guidance and encouragement, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for financial support, forest Department, West Bengal for their co-operation and Elbert Sangma, driver, Raja Sen and Dillip Roy, Field Assistants for their help in fied studies.

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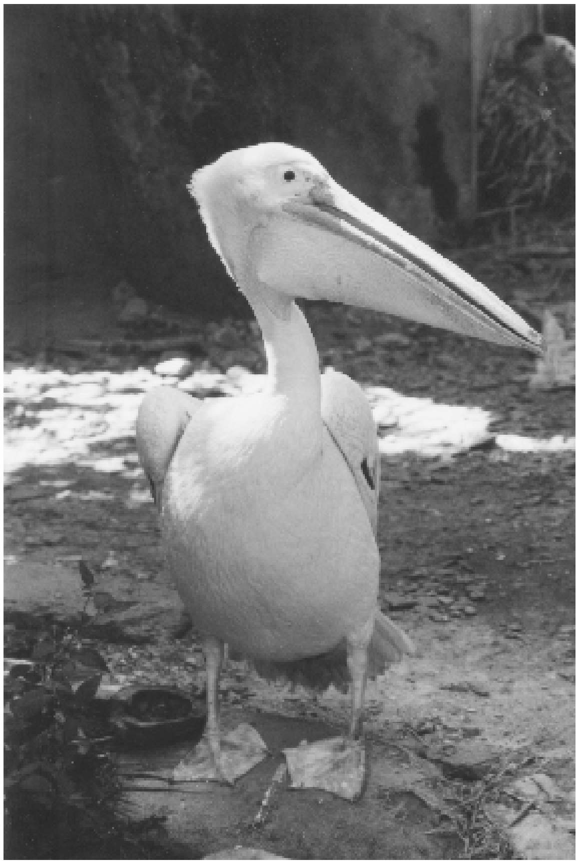
RARE SIGHTING OF GREAT WHITE PELICAN IN UDUPI DISTRICT OF KARNATAKA STATE. GOPALAKRISHNA BHATTA and PUSHPALATHA B., 'Pushpacinchana', MIG-14, HUDCO Colony, Manipal, 576 104 (Email: gkb@sancharnet.in)



It was on Vijayadashami Day (October 5th 2003) at around 8.30 A.M. a passerby motorcyclist, Nayak, saw some people in 3 boats chasing a big white bird in the river at Mabukala, about 25 km from Udupi. Nayak, being a nature lover and conservationist with pleaded them not to kill the bird saying that it was a migratory bird that came from distant place. He brought the bird almost in a state of unconsciousness with the help of a pillion rider to Saligrama town and handed it over to Sudheendra Aithal, a locally famous animal lover who rears and breeds a dozen animals in captivity. Aithal treated the pelican with Ayurvedic medicine – applied oil to the wounds and gave 2-3 'oil-massage' every day. For nearly 22 days the pelican, although alive, remained inactive, always lying down in the place where it was kept. The bird was force-fed with fishes. The authors revisited the place on November 5th and saw the bird quite active. It is found moving all around in nearly 2 acres of garden around the house, which is well protected.

Aithal's family named this pelican as 'Prithvi'. It has developed so close on intimacy with Aithal that the pelican, wherever it may be, comes in search of him whenever his voice is heard. It never tolerates anybody approaching Aithal, including his mother, Vimalakshi. If the bird is in the vicinity, when we go nearer to Aithal, the bird comes to peck at us. The pelican that is left free whole day, visits a nearby tank of Saligrama Guru Narasimha Temple, which is just in front of Aithal's house once a day and spends about 1-2 hours there. The bird is fed with 6 kgs of fish per day. It prefers sardine to any other marine fishes, seldom eating fresh water fishes. Prithvi is 132 cm in length and 77 cm in height. The arrival of great white pelican is attracting a number of bird lovers to Saligrama.

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Cover : Female **Tickell's Blue Flycatcher** (*Cyornis tickelliae*) at nest. This graceful blue coloured flycatcher prefers to build its nest in thick cover and shade and on the wooded banks of streams. It continually sings a merry little song and flits about the bushes. Its population has declined drastically due to habitat loss.

Photo : S. Sridhar, ARPS